TEACHING OF JESUS.

TWENTY LESSONS

FOR

ADVANCED CLASSES.

BY

THOMAS R. SLICER.

SIXTH EDITION.

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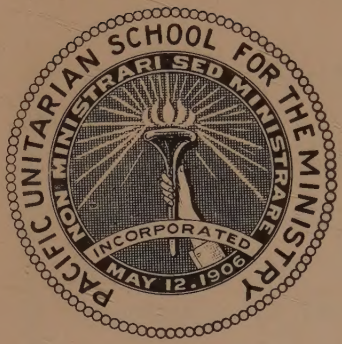

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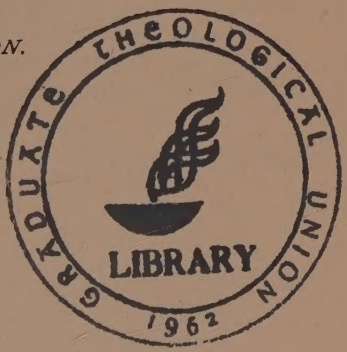

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PREFACE.

Although the Unitarian Sunday-School Society has published from time to time courses of study upon the Life of Jesus and the Teaching of Jesus, it has been thought necessary and profitable to issue twenty lessons upon the Parables of Jesus, as a summary of his thought and purpose in the good news of God which promised a kingdom of Heaven on earth.

In these lessons for the older students an effort has been made to show how an unbroken purpose runs through them all, of the divine life, told in the oriental way as sermon-stories,— the things of common life as the likeness of the spiritual life. Especial care has been taken to show by parallel texts the resemblances and differences in the method of editing which mark the four gospels. These references should be most studiously observed. No reference should be passed by without being consulted, for much of the value of these lessons lies in this study with the gospels at hand.

An effort has been made to show that the parables convey veritable cheer for the life which now is. They have a distinct trend in one direction,— the consecration, courage, and love of a soul in which the kingdom of Heaven already appears. Jesus of Nazareth is himself "the best example of the sacred man," and his picture-sermons declare his "plan of salvation"; "the Life was the Light of men."

THOMAS R. SLICER.

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LESSON I.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

LESSON TEXT.—"Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth."—MATT. vi. 10.

The meaning of the phrase "kingdom of Heaven."

I. TO THE JEWS,

There was no difference between State and Church. The Jewish State was the Jewish Church. The Jews worshipped the king, for God was king. Their ideal was a theocracy. They constantly referred to the reigns of David and Solomon for the glory of the nation in the past, and to the reign of the Messiah for the glory to come. They meant by "kingdom of Heaven" a future age, not in heaven, but on earth. They daily prayed, "May He quickly cause his kingdom to come."

The Book of Daniel, a *war document*, issued to inspire courage in the time of the struggle for freedom under the leadership of the Maccabees, is the statement of the theocracy as held by Jews of the second century before Christ (read Dan. ii. 44 and vii. 13, 14).

See also how the editors of the older material for the histories of Israel constantly brought the idea of a kingdom of God forward, as, for instance, Ex. xix. 3-6.

THE EXPECTATION that God would interfere to deliver them from every oppression was keen among the Jews when John the Baptizer began to call them to repentance with the announcement, "The kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" (Matt. iii. 1-12; Luke iii. 1-17.) See also what is said of Simeon (Luke ii. 25, 26), and of Joseph, who gave Jesus burial (Mark xv. 43). Also read Luke xvii. 20, xix. 11; Acts i. 6.

THE EXPECTATION HAD PASSED THROUGH THREE STAGES, more or less distinct, in the thought of the Jewish people: the thought of Messiah (1) *as a king* to rule on earth according to the will of God in heaven; (2 *all the Jewish people* as a nation Messianic,—a union of Messiah-qualities; (3) they pictured the Messiah as the perfectly righteous man, the ideal character, the "Israelite indeed." Hence the saying among the Jews (with reference to 2 and 3), "In the day when a man shall keep the whole law Messiah will come."

"This picture of a glorious and ideal kingdom of God in Israel, and extending from Israel over all the world, was really the fundamental idea of the Messianic hope. The so-called Messianic idea in the narrower sense, the hope of a personal Messiah, was quite subordinate to this fundamental idea,—a fact which cannot be too much attended to."

II. JESUS TAKES UP JOHN'S CRY, "THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND!"

What did Jesus mean by it? Did he mean what John meant, something *different*, or something *more?*

Jesus seems to have understood and appreciated John better than John appreciated Jesus (read xi. 2-15).

Jesus was exactly in line with those prophets of Israel who believed that righteousness is the foundation of the kingdom of God. He was at variance with those who laid all the emphasis on "*when*" and "*who*"; he said always "*what the kingdom is like*," and declared it already "among" them (Luke xvii. 20, 21).

Therefore Jesus was rejected by the Zealots (Matt. xxii. 16, 17), who thought him not patriotic; by the Pharisees, who thought he did not enough attend to "outward show," was not exact enough (Matt. xv. 1-9). For the estimate Jesus put on the outside and the inside righteousness, read carefully Matt. xv. 10-20. He was unacceptable to the Sadducees because their priestly influence had made the religion of their day exclusive, hard, and

mechanical. The expectation of the Jews concerning the kingdom of Heaven Jesus tried to enlighten, to simplify, and to lift by showing what the kingdom of God must be like. This he did in the parables — the word-pictures — which will be the subject of the lessons following this. They all illustrate the saying of Asa Gray, the naturalist, "Childhood is instructed by instances, manhood is instructed by laws"; or, as it was expressed by a great dramatic artist, "We begin with the real and tend ever towards the ideal." (See Luke viii. 9, 10.)

III. Suggested Topics.

1. It is difficult to determine how far Jesus regarded himself the Christ, the Messiah. That he did so regard himself would appear (Toy, "Judaism and Christianity,") from Mark viii. 29; Matt. xvi. 17; Luke ix. 20; but in these passages his assent is only partial, and is accompanied by the command not to let the opinion spread abroad. The reply to the high priest (Mark xvi. 62) is more difficult to explain, and seems to belong to the same rank with John i. 51.

2. Always keep in mind in reading the gospels what is true of all ancient stories finally preserved in written form,— namely, the *three points of view* from which they are to be regarded. The student must put himself into the attitude required by

a. The original incident; *how* did it occur?

b. Those who remembered it; *how did it seem* to them or those to whom they told it?

c. Those who collected the incidents together, edited the remembered incidents or sayings; *to what use were they put* in fixing them in written, permanent form?

No one can study these lessons with profit unless these three points of view are kept well before the mind all the time. They are the three strands of different color plaited into many of the doings and sayings recorded in the life of Jesus. They can be *seen* often when they cannot be perfectly separated.

3. See how Jesus speaks of the kingdom as here, yet expected; present, yet to come; received, yet to be entered,— as in Luke xviii. 17 and, especially, John iii. 13.

4. The use in Matthew's gospel of the phrase "kingdom of Heaven" (thirty-two times), and the use "kingdom of God" in Mark and Luke, and the substitution of "life" and "eternal life" in John's gospel, as the equivalent of these terms.

5. In what sense can Matt. xxv. 34 be true? Do the dreams of Plato in his "Republic" or More in his "Utopia" throw any light on this?

6. How is the modern study of social conditions and the effort to improve them related to the kingdom of Heaven as Jesus believed in it? What force is there in the term now used, "*Applied* Christianity"? (Matt. xxi. 43, 44; Matt. viii. 11, 12.)

LESSON II.

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

(Matthew xiii. 45, 46.)

LESSON TEXT.— "Seek ye first his [the Father's] kingdom and his righteousness."—MATT. vi. 33.

READ, in immediate connection with the finding of the great pearl, the finding of the hidden "treasure" (Matt. xiii. 44).

I. THE RECORD.

The thirteenth chapter of Matthew makes the impression that all these parables were spoken at one time, but this is not probable. They are put together by the editor of these "sayings of the Lord" (see lesson one, suggestion 2) because they all look toward the same view of what "the kingdom of Heaven is like." Probably these parables were "texts for sermons," as we would say; and they are collected together (Matt. xiii.), as the Sermon on the Mount is placed (Matt. v.-vii.), according to the structure of this gospel, in layers, showing how it was built up as a document. These same sayings are *scattered through* the other gospels. This is in accord with the early tradition that "Matthew preserved the sayings of the Lord, and each one translated them as he was able." "The Pearl of Great Price" and "the Hidden Treasure" are alike in some respects, different in other respects.

ALIKE. In being valuable, enriching the finder, and giving him great joy in possession.

DIFFERENT. In that the man who found the treasure was not looking for it,— he stumbled on it, then got it in the way of trade; it enriched the field first, him afterward. It was not like what he bought, but was something added to it. The Pearl of Great Price differed only in quality, value, from the pearls the merchant was in the habit of buying. He was seeking the best.

ALIKE. In the risking of all for this one possession, for the same reason a right estimate of the prize.

II. THE MEANING: THE CHIEF GOOD.

The kingdom of Heaven is not something given as not belonging to our life; but, as in the treasure, it was waiting a discoverer, and, in the pearl, a man who knew what pearls are worth. The kingdom of Heaven is built up on our appreciation of what it is like. In each case the man who found the great riches did nothing to make it richer. If he had found a diamond or any other jewel, he would have had to take it to an expert workman to cut it and set it; but a pearl is from the first A PEARL. The treasure was perhaps some hoard of money hid in war-time or during absence, by some one who had not returned home; by the Jewish law it belonged to the finder. The man who owned the field did not know it was there: he had not hid it.

The one strong point in the stories, which takes the emphasis in each, is the *absolute abandon* (Matt. xvi. 24–26) shown by the man in each case; nothing is worth anything except as it will put him in possession of the Great Pearl, the Great Treasure.

The pre-eminent value and reward of the kingdom of Heaven, in fact, wait for the man who counts all else dross that he may gain it. (See Phil. iii. 7, 8, for Paul's estimate.) Said Robertson: "He who would save others cannot save himself." Nice calculation of cost does not go with great devotion to a cause.

The enrichment of the man who enters into possession of the kingdom of Heaven has no reference in these parables to the joy of "getting to heaven," as the common phrase is among emotional Christians, who begin their heaven in the next world. The man is still a merchant who finds the pearl, and he finds it in pursuing his ordinary tasks; the other is still the owner of a field after the treasure is taken out of it. We are not told that they were "*ready now to die.*" Probably we would say they are now *prepared to live* on terms better than before their great discovery. They have been made rich *here* and *now.*

Nor *is any class* indicated to whom such a discovery is reserved exclusively. The kingdom of Heaven is made up of common folk, every-day people.

III. SUGGESTED TOPICS.

1. How can the possession of the kingdom of Heaven now and here be secured in respect of a *Philosophy of Life* that will make us rich in life's power and resource? We are only rich as we gain an experience of religion,—a passion for doing the will of God.

2. *A Rational Philosophy of Religion*, which shall make all other reason contribute to its reasonableness.

3. *A Practical Code of Ethics*, which will bring in a new rule of conduct by furnishing a fit inspiration. *New Life by New Inspiration.*

4. Is not the half-hearted way in which we put the kingdom of Heaven last, and not first, in our thought, the reason that the business of religion succeeds so poorly? If it is worth anything, it deserves everything. Religion is human nature at its best; it is not another life, but a better life here and now.

5. What illustrations from history can you give which will show the way in which "the seekers after God" abandoned all for the kingdom of God? (Hillel and the Law; Socrates and wisdom; see also John xviii. 37.)

6. Does the teaching of Jesus about "denying one's self" limit life or enhance its zest and joy (Luke xii. 29–34)?

NOTE.—In the "hidden treasure" we have an illustration of New Testament use of the word "mystery." It is not so hid that it cannot be found, but belongs to him who finds it. "There is nothing hid that shall not be revealed," said Jesus. The truth is never new: it is only newly discovered or newly applied. (Read 1 Cor. ii. 9-13.)

A parable is something given as "the measure" of something else. It is not meant to touch in the measuring at every point. The origin of the word implies that it is "*projected*,"—thrown out along lines of general resemblance. Much of the force and beauty of a parable is lost by looking at it too minutely and expecting exactness in all details.

For illustrations of local meaning of the pearl and treasure for the Jews, see Thomson's "The Parables and Their Home"; also, for instances of costly gems, see "A Popular Account of Gems," by Louis Dieulafait. Some good suggestions may be found in "The Parabolic Teaching of Christ," by Bruce.

LESSON III.

THE HOUSE ON THE ROCK.

(Matthew vii. 24–27; Luke vi. 46–49.)

LESSON TEXT.—"The foundation of God standeth sure."—2 TIM. ii. 19.

I. THE RECORD.

Matthew and Luke give the parable; neither introduces it by the usual phrase, "The kingdom of Heaven is like," but both use it as an illustration of the foregoing plea for genuine devotion to the fundamental principles of that kingdom. In Matthew's account the scene is the final testing of the tree by its fruits,—the examination of those who professed devotion as disciples. In Luke it is introduced by the sharp inquiry, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord [master], and do not the things which I say?" (Luke vi. 46.)

Matthew says "heareth and doeth"; Luke, "Every one that cometh unto me and heareth and doeth"; Matthew, "built his house upon a rock," "built his house upon the sand"; Luke, "digged and went deep, and laid a foundation upon the rock," "built his house upon the earth, without a foundation"; Matthew, "Rains descended, floods came, winds blew; it fell not"; Luke, "When the flood arose, the stream brake against that house, and could not shake it," so also "against which the stream brake, and straightway it fell in."

The picture is evidently intended to place the building of the house on some low land, dry for the most part, but subject to inundation when the rains have swollen the stream near by. The house is not set up upon a rock *above* the reach of the stream, but is founded on a rock below the shifting surface of the ground,—"digged and went deep." The "swelling of Jordan," so often referred to in the Old Testament, is evidently the scene in the eye of the Great Teacher.

II. THE OCCASION.

Jesus was now separated in his teaching from his former master, John the Baptizer. John had preached *awful tidings*, Jesus *good tidings*. As John had said, so it had come to pass. Jesus was "increasing," John "decreasing," in the popular regard. Jesus was followed by crowds that he knew would "be scattered, each to his own, and leave me alone" (John xvi. 31, 32). John had also foretold that he that should come after him would have his fan in his hand and separate the grain from the chaff.

III. THE MOTIVE.

Jesus now warns them that this process will not be due to any arbitrary judgment, but will be the result of the way in which they have "*done*" the things they had heard. Jesus would not accept a mere personal allegiance: his truth was more than himself,—"He that receiveth me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me" (Mark ix. 37).

He had fascinated them with the beauty of his character, with "the sweet reasonableness" of his words, and with the promises of the kingdom of Heaven which he proclaimed; he wanted to make a practical issue between such devotion and real religion, which is *a passionate devotion to the will of God*. He illustrated his faith in the necessity not to have many believers of the truth, but to believe tremendously the truth, though only by one believer. "The way was strait," "the entrance was narrow"; probably

only "few would find it." He had "called many," but few would come up to standard and be "chosen"; these must "strive to enter" (agonize).

But he now, as always, casts the burden on the "practical reason," the *doing* what was heard, the fruit of the tree, the man inside the clothing (Matt. vii. 15–23). Even "casting out demons" and doing "mighty works" would not be counted; nothing but deep laid purpose, on which practical life was built up. Not creed, but deed; not saying, but doing; not the building, but the permanence of it; not the superstructure, but the underpinning; not fair weather, but stormy times. Jesus knew that his truth would bring a crisis in the affairs of men and the personal history of each disciple. "Think not that I am come to send peace, but a sword" (see, further, Matt. x. 34–39). So it proved (compare Luke v. 11 with Matt. xxvi. 56, 57).

IV. THE TESTS OF REAL RELIGION.

1. *The motive* which inspires it. There is a religion of fear, of custom, of services, of ecclesiastical machinery; and there is a religion of personal conviction, of communion with God and love to God. It is a question of how "deep it goes" to find a fit "*foundation*."

2. *The simplicity* of its beginning. Jesus built from below upward. He used the facts of human nature (Matt. vii. 9–12): speculation as to *what may be* has little place in his teaching. What *is*, not what *seems* or what *has been*, was all-important to his mind.

3. The way in which *it applies to daily life*. The early church had no consistent *theory* of religion nor any perfect record of the life of its Lord. But it had a very clear idea of the right life. Its whole first purpose, consistently maintained as foundation for everything else, was the *adjustment of human relations* — the conduct of life — so as to make a kingdom of Heaven on earth.

V. ALSO.

1. Not adjustment to the past, but applicability to the present, insures the future of religion. The real question in religion is not its antiquity, its respectability, its history, but its performance of the present duty. Those who "wish for primitive Christianity" are not so wise as those who wish for a Christianity as well fitted to this age as primitive Christianity was to its own age (Matt. ix. 16, 17).

2. The *greatest strain* is the test of the greatest strength. The kingdom of Heaven can only come to those who are ready to stand the storm and stress of life. The building of faith must be built for the hardest strain which can come. It must be founded on the facts of the soul's life, not built up out of the conceits of imagination, taste, or inclination; these all fall in when the stream of life beats violently against the house. These all perish in the fire of some burning sorrow (1 Cor. iii. 10–17). To enforce this, tell the history of burnt Corinth and the new Corinth of Paul's day.

NOTE.— A definition may change, but the reality we seek to describe remains. The only unchanging definition is that which exactly describes the Reality. The facts never change. They are the infallible "vicars of almighty God" in common life.

LESSON IV.

THE LEAVEN.

(Matthew xiii. 33; Luke xiii. 20, 21.)

LESSON TEXT.—"A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."—GAL. v. 9.

I. THE RECORD.

In Matthew's gospel this parable of the leaven is one of the series which make up the thirteenth-chapter parables, all descriptive of the principles involved in the heavenly rule of life among men. In Luke it forms, with "the mustard seed" parable, a separate statement, apparently unconnected either with what goes before it or follows it. It is simply a remembered "saying of the Lord," dropped into the record at this place. It may be considered as a warning to those who were unduly elated at his refutation of the bigots who had raised the Sabbath question, and had seen his work of healing on "the woman whom Satan had bound, lo, these eighteen years." This reminder that the kingdom of Heaven must grow slowly from small beginnings may be connected with what goes before in Luke's account, but it is not likely that there is any connection intended.

The parable of the leaven is one of the briefest and simplest of all the sayings as to what "the kingdom of Heaven is like."

II. THE MEANING.

The measures of meal are measures of good meal, but they need something more to make the meal into bread. That which is put into the three measures (above a bushel) of meal is so small it may be said to be hid out of sight. The effort is to so thoroughly mix it with the meal that it shall not appear until it begins "to work." Then the whole lump of dough expands, grows light, is leavened,—lightened,—and becomes fit for baking into bread.

The kingdom of Heaven works *from within the world's thought as inspiration*, within the world's action *as motive*, within the world's growth *as usefulness*. It makes the world fit for the use of man, as the meal is made fit for the oven and the table as food. It has been said that it "requires both God and man to make a loaf of bread." So the kingdom of Heaven has its material in the natural world; but its power to make the natural serve the purposes of the kingdom is *brought into it*, like the leaven into the meal.

We are not born perfect men and women: we are born, if we are fortunate, perfectly formed babies. We are to bring the *expanding life* into our bodies by means of *food*, into our minds by means of *knowledge*, into our souls by means of the *spirit of God*, so that the little creature, who comes into the world helpless, grows strong, wise, and good. He has grown great from the centre outward.

The whole problem of growth is to so assimilate the contributions made to our being as to turn them into our well-being. The chemical process which goes forward in the leavening of the meal, the way in which vital organisms multiply and spread their life, has its analogy in every day's life. But in a higher sense, also, we are methods of the spirit of life (Rom. viii. 2).

Jesus himself evidently grew to know that the kingdom of Heaven was like something quite different from what he had been taught,

as a "son of the Law," to expect. He seems to have had one expectation in the beginning of his ministry and quite another as the ministry became more personal and more entirely a ministry *of the Spirit to the spirit.* Whatever increases a man's knowledge of God — confidence in the triumph of truth by its own power, and the sufficiency of the soul for its own well-being — is a real growth. Jesus is himself "the best example of the saved man," the man of the kingdom of Heaven (John xvii. 19); *so he becomes the Saviour* of other men. See the beautiful statement Heb. v. 7, 8, 9; also Luke ii. 52 and John xv. 3.

III. Another Interpretation.

The references to "leaven" in the Old and New Testaments generally turn up the fact that it ferments, sours, and so seems to corrupt that into which it is put (Ex. xii. 15; xiii. 7; Lev. ii. 11; Matt. xvi. 6; Mark viii. 15; Luke xii. 1; 1 Cor. v. 7). In all these passages "leaven" is spoken of as a thing to be avoided.

At the feast of the Passover the house was searched with candles, that no smallest bit of leaven or leavened bread might remain. The Jew at that time would leave any important work to join in the search for the leaven, to cast it out before the Passover was celebrated. These Scriptures and this usage have suggested that Jesus meant to warn his disciples against the corruptions of his teaching which would creep in, and secretly spread, and corrupt the purity of religion; this he did (Matt. xvi. 5-12). But here the explanation is carefully made that it was not the leaven of bread, but of doctrine, to which he referred (read the passage carefully).

This view of the parable of the leaven as a warning is not consistent with its companion parable, "the mustard seed." We must not multiply difficulties, but aim always at simplicity in explaining the words of Jesus. He was not a scribe, dealing in refinements of commentary: he was an original worker, saying how things appeared to his clear eye. The one central idea is very simple: it is the growth of the kingdom from inner forces which expand it,— the enlargement of life by bringing into it new power to develop it.

IV Questions and Topics.

1. What is leaven? How does it "work"? Is the old view of Jesus' time the present view of how yeast "works"? State the chemical process. What is meant by "wild" yeast? (See Thompson's "Parables and Their Home.")

2. Why did the Jews attach so much importance to getting the house cleaned before the Passover? Why did they use only unleavened bread (Ex. xii. 15; xiii. 3)?

3. To what evil dispositions is leaven compared in the Scripture (Luke xii. 1; 1 Cor. v. 8)?

4. What difference does life make *in the way* that growth proceeds in the natural world? How does a plant grow and a crystal form? How does a silk moth become a piece of silk or satin?

5. How is character formed,—rapidly or slowly, from within or from without? Does character need great opportunities to become great, or only great motives? (See, in Martineau's "Endeavors," "Great Hopes for Great Souls"; 1 Pet. ii. 1, 2.)

6. How far have we arrived at the ideal of Jesus, that his truth, hid in us, shall leaven the whole of our nature? Read Heb. v. 12, 13, 14.

7. Does the kingdom of Heaven depend on the whole number being leavened or the whole man? Read carefully Eph. iv. 11-16.

LESSON V.

THE MUSTARD SEED.

(Matthew xiii. 31, 32; Mark iv. 31, 32; Luke xiii. 19, 20.)

LESSON TEXT.—"Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."—LUKE xii. 32.

I. THE RECORD is in all the synoptic gospels.

That in Mark is most graphic, as is the pictorial method of that gospel, and is an exaggeration in saying that the mustard plant is in its beginning "smaller than all the seeds that are upon the earth," and that it "becometh greater than all the herbs," and "putteth out great branches." The other gospels simply emphasize the fact that it begins small and grows to be a large plant.

II. THE FACT.

"As small as a mustard seed" was a common saying among the people who heard Jesus speak. The full-grown mustard plant would reach to the height of a man. It has been suggested that by "mustard seed" is meant the *Khardal* (Arabic for mustard), as suggested by travellers in Syria (see Bruce's "Parabolic Teaching of Christ"), which grows on the borders of the Dead Sea to the height of twenty-five feet, and has a pungent fruit growing in clusters like currants, and grows from a small seed. But, although this is plausible, it is not probable, as this tree does not grow in any part of Palestine in which Jesus taught, and would not be familiar to the eyes of his hearers. Besides, a tree twenty-five feet high does not seem to be a matter of wonder so much as a garden herb, half as great, growing from a very small seed.

III. THE MEANING.

We get here the illustration of the principle which is to be kept in mind in all these parables; we are not required to be ingenious in explaining the words of Jesus, but to take their *obvious meaning*. Here we have the comparison of something growing continually more and more by external influences,—a plant set in a garden, watered by the rain, fed by the soil, growing in the sunlight,—an out-of-door parable. As in the leaven, a secret process wrought its work silently, and was known only by its results,—a parable of quiet, secret sources of growth and larger use.

We get therefore, in the parable of the mustard seed, a likeness to the kingdom of Heaven as it increases and enlarges before the eyes of men, the growing kingdom of God in the world, as the other parable (the leaven) showed the growing truth of God in the soul.

IV. TOPICS.

1. The seed of the kingdom was very insignificant, as we measure things that are to grow great. For instance: the place where it was planted, "the garden,"—an obscure province of the Roman world, among a people despised by the kings of the earth,

having no control of the imperial forces of the world then; the man who cast it into the world-garden,— an artisan, of the common people, from a district even his own people ridiculed as uncouth and uncultivated. Verily it was a "*little seed*." Those who were to tend its growth, the apostles, who were attached to him, who planted the seed, were unlearned men, of no influence or position. One of them was a despised publican; several of them were fishermen, who were to leave their nets and "catch men" (Mark i. 17).

2. Jesus did not start out with the intention of organizing a new world-power; he made no announcement of a great campaign; he used no machinery, such as the church found convenient later on; he made no cunning combinations, such as Constantine found useful; he did not seek to impress the eye or the imagination; he did not draw pictures of the bliss of heaven, like Mohammed; he offered no promise of exemption from life's ills; he did not come to send peace, but a sword; his Beatitudes were not what his age called blessed; and he utterly failed to win many followers who could be depended upon to carry out his plans, even if he had any plans. It was the "smallest of all the seeds that be in the earth."

3. We find only his mother and Mary Magdalene, and John the beloved disciple, and one or two more, at the cross of Jesus and near his grave. We are told that they could summon after his death, of all that loved him and believed in him, "five hundred brethren" (1 Cor. xv. 6). But we read that on the day of Pentecost there were added to the group the congregation of about three thousand souls, who had joined the disciples, convinced by the brave words of Peter, who had recovered his courage. The leaven of truth had leavened his lumpish and cowardly nature (Acts ii. 41–47). The little seed had become a great plant already (Acts v. 14, 15).

V. SUGGESTIONS.

1. Note how many churches the Book of Acts shows were started in the generation in which Paul lived and worked. Paul says of the small beginnings some very striking things in the line of this parable of the mustard seed (1 Cor. i. 26–29). The Book of Revelation also names the churches (chap. ii., iii.), and shows how in some there was good leaven and in some the leaven of malice and wickedness. But there had been a great growth from the little seed, so that the writer of that Book of Revelation sees in his vision a multitude which no man could number, who were to belong to the kingdom of God on earth (Rev. vii. 9; xxi. 25–27). These are not descriptions of a future heaven, but of the New Jerusalem, which should be the kingdom of Heaven among men, when the little seed should be fully grown to be a great tree, so that "the birds of heaven could rest under the shadow of it."

2. Tell the story of the growth of the church through the second and third century, until the Roman emperors made it, for political reasons, the object of their devotion and protection.

3. Did this great growth help or hinder real religion? Can numbers be regarded as any test for strength? Even in motives do we not have to discriminate between the *strength* of a motive and the *worth* of a motive? Chrysostom's estimate of his age: It had silver and gold, but could not say to the lame man, "Rise up and walk" (Acts iii. 1–10).

NOTE.— Further study of this subject will be taken up in the second division of this course of lessons. Much light on this lesson may be gained from Allen's "Fragments of Christian History," earlier chapters.

LESSON VI.

THE TALENTS.

(Matthew xxv. 14-30.)

LESSON TEXT.—"Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things."—MATT. xxv. 23.

I. THE RECORD.

Only in Matthew's gospel; but the parable of the pounds, in Luke xix. 12-27, seems to be the same parable differently phrased in certain particulars. Both are introduced alike by reference to the coming of the Lord in judgment upon the faithfulness of men. The parable in Matthew follows that of "the wise and foolish virgins" and the exhortation to *watch*, while the version in Luke is spoken in answer to the state of popular expectation that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.

II. THE MEANING.

Both parables are full of the HOPE OF MESSIAH'S COMING AND THE NEW AGE. The church, a little later, made them parables of "JUDGMENT," and still later constructed out of them and similar material pictures for preachers and painters of the LAST JUDGMENT. Few parables have lent themselves more readily to the uses of imaginative exegesis and impressive and "awakening" use in the pulpit. They are used by Jesus to emphasize the every-day fidelities of life and the equal justice with which equal fidelity is rewarded. Rightly construed, the parable of the talents is a comforting and encouraging word for the efficient who do good work and the inefficient who do as well as they can. It is a re-enforcement of the truth that "God is no respecter of persons," but a weigher of life's actions. These parables are pages taken from the Book of Life by the Master of the Art of Living. They are of every-day application. Our concern should not centre in a last judgment, but in the first judgment; for it is near to every unfaithful soul to whom something is committed in trust, to use and return to the Great Giver with interest.

III. SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE PARABLE AND TOPICS SUGGESTED BY THEM.

1. *The Absence of the Master.* We are always holding trust-funds of life for a Master who is out of sight. We are intrusted with life absolutely for a time. We are free to use or lose.

2. *The Division of the Goods.* God works by instruments, not directly; he builds up his world out of the lives of men. The division was not in equal amount, yet was just; for the amount of each was equal to his ability (verse 15). The work of life does not weary him who carries a great load, but wearies him who carries a little load greater than he can bear. We are not expected to do or be great, but to be faithful.

3. *The Diversity of Method* in the servants. Straightway the servant who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and he who had received the two did likewise.

Note how the "straightway" applies to the prompt way in which responsibility is realised and acted upon. He was alive to the situation. In the Authorized Version it is applied to the Master's journey; this is not correct, and has no force. Compare Authorized Version and Revised Version.

He who received one talent took care of it, but made no use of it; and, whilst each of his fellow-servants doubled his capital, *he* only doubled the napkin about his and hid it in the earth. He treated it as a dog would treat a treasure: he kept watch over it. He was on guard. He planted it in the earth; but the earth, which is the bank in which the treasure of grain accumulates interest and increase, is only a grave for the talent of gold. It comes out as it went in, no more, no less. It has been idle and useless; and the one thing which all nature and the will of God make no provision for is idleness.

IV. The Reckoning.

The parable is addressed to those who are impatient for the New Age (Acts i. 6–9). The phrase "after a long time" (verse 19) is the rebuke of this impatience.

So, also, the commendation, "Well done, good and faithful!" indicates no haste, no suddenness, but only "character and application," the union of heart and hand in the work; it would seem, as these good and faithful were "*bond-servants*," in a sense slaves, at least under contract and absolute control of the lord who had trusted them to manage his affairs, that the commendation, "Enter thou into the joy of thy lord: I will make thee ruler over many things," implied emancipation and change of condition. They had been slaves, now they were to be masters; they had been appointed to serve, now they were appointed to rule. This is the law of life: we rise from service by serving; we are fit to command because we are able to obey. This is the secret of promotion to greatness, as Jesus teaches his disciples in many sayings (Matt. v. 19; Luke ix. 48; xxii. 24–28; the latter part of this passage (Luke xxii. 29, 30) has the coloring of a later time).

"The poor in spirit," "the meek," are accounted blessed in the list of those who are named in the Beatitudes (Matt. v.).

This also is the law of nature, the changes of form; the rise in the scale of life comes always after outgrowing earlier conditions. Many a man who has much grows smaller in having much, but much *use* leads to increase.

V. The Excuse of the Faithless Servant.

He misrepresented his lord's character, but on his own showing he ought to have been the more solicitous to improve his trust, since, being a servant, he had no choice. He was confronted by the inevitable,— obligation, trust-funds, opportunity, example of his fellow-servants, and a reckoning which was sure to come. He was condemned, not because he had small ability; his master knew that, and only gave him one talent. But, if he knew not enough to trade with his trust, he ought to have trusted some one else ("the bank," "the exchangers") to invest it for him or at least pay interest on it as a loan. He was "wicked and slothful."

What he charged on his master as an injustice (verses 24–26) is really seen as generosity in nature. The farmer always "reaps what he did not sow"; he reaps, not at all what he sowed, but many-fold more of the same kind. All increase and gain come not from the hardness, but the liberality of nature. Then is expected of us what we ourselves have been taught to expect,— not something for nothing, but, *for every something, something more.* So the master does not dispute the servant's estimate of him, but urges it as a reason for greater fidelity.

The one talent is now given to the man who has ten already, with the statement of the general law that "to every one that hath shall be given" (verse 29; compare Matt. xiii. 12). How is this to be explained? How is it commonly misunderstood? Is "having" to be limited to "holding," or is it not also applied to being? What *we are* is also a part of our "trust." We must repay what we have cost the past.

LESSON VII.

THE SOWER.

(Matthew xiii. 1-9; 18-23; Luke viii. 4-15.)

LESSON TEXT.—"The field is the world."—MATT. xiii. 38.

I. THE RECORD.

In both Matthew's gospel and Luke's. In Matthew in more expanded form, with parenthesis about the use of parables, which is probably authentic, and is a good example of the *literary use* of the Old Testament by the New Testament writers. Matthew says the multitude was so great when Jesus began to speak that he had to enter a boat and put a space thus between him and the crowd; Luke says, "They of every city resorted to him." The popularity of Jesus as a teacher and his power as a master were now at their height in Galilee; perhaps we may connect John vi. with a time just after this, as stating the crisis which came in the midst of the excitement of the multitude about Jesus (so Bruce, "Parabolic Teaching of Christ"). If this be true, it gives fresh force to the parable of the sower.

II. THE FOUR KINDS OF SOIL.

The scene is familiar; the application, a common one among Jewish teachers. As in the parable of the tares, it is the word of the kingdom (Matt.), "the word of God" (Luke). The field is the world, the sower is the Son of Man.

The scene is very simply outlined. The seed is good; the sower is in earnest; the field shows four common kinds of soil, all good, but not all equally ready.

1. The hard path across the field, or outside boundary, on which the seed will fall as the wind carries it.

2. The thin soil, covering stony places in the field. The plough used in Galilee would slip over the stones, as it merely scratched the soil. (Describe the agricultural implements used.)

3. The foul soil, in which weeds and thorns had not been killed out. It looked ready, but contained evil seed and good seed.

4. The good soil, ready for the sowing, deep enough to hold the moisture, and free from the seed of evil things.

III. THE EXPLANATION

Is given by Jesus himself. Note the four kinds of reception given the good seed of the good sower.

1. DIVIDED NATURES, accessible to evil influences as well as good. The word of truth does not sink deep; it is heard, but not believed (Luke viii. 12), and is easily lost (Matt. xiii. 19). It is not really understood; they have not a "united heart." They are not "alive unto God" (Rom. vi. 11). These might be the scribes and Pharisees in the congregation standing about Jesus as he taught.

2. SUPERFICIAL NATURES, who are always ready to hear, find it easy to believe, but find it difficult to hold to one purpose. The seed springs up all the quicker because the soil is warm over the rock which lies below the thin layer. Had no root in themselves

(Gen. xlix. 4; James i. 7, 8; 2 Pet. iii. 14, 18). The Herodians would be such hearers of Jesus. It is struggle of soul which saves. Tell the story of Simon Peter's career, in illustration of this kind of hearing the truth.

3. THE PREOCCUPIED NATURES. The word of truth has to contend for a place in them. They have not cast out the evil, but seek to make a compromise between it and the good. They want to crowd through the needle's eye (Matt. xix. 24) with all their load. They have not committed themselves to the cause of truth. The weeds of unworthy motive and desire have an equal chance, and will choke the good seed. The weeds were native to the soil, the good seed a new comer there.

The young ruler was such an one (Mark x. 17–23). The majority of the Sadducees were, in their materialism, such soil of truth as here described.

4. THE PREPARED, RECEPTIVE NATURES. This good soil was probably *no better earth* than that which was in the other parts of the field. But it was *better soil*,— better than (1), because it was not hard, "trodden under foot," it had been mellowed; better than (2), because it had depth and was good all the way down; better than (3), because it was not harboring thorns and weeds to dispute the growth of the grain. It is called by that fine description, "an honest and good heart."

IV. SUGGESTED TOPICS.

1. This parable was spoken to a multitude of all sorts of people, not simply to the disciples, who were to go forth to sow. It is as important for people to know what they are like as for the preacher to know what he is to expect. This the disciples did not understand. They wondered why the soil should hear itself described; Jesus explains (Matt. xiii. 10–18).

2. The standard of character is to be found in the way in which truth is received and in the fruit it bears in such character. The truth is always the same. It is a uniform test; and its fruit is always the same in kind, sometimes thirtyfold, sometimes more, but never anything else but the fruit of truth in human life.

3. Jesus was speaking to people who accounted for evil by the theory of a personal devil (verse 19); and, as he was dealing with the *results in an evil nature*, and not with the origin of evil, he used the common language of the time. He thought "the thoughts of God after him," but must tell them in the language of men.

4. He charges the failure of the truth in us to conditions which we can control and correct. The path across the field could be ploughed, the stones could be gathered out, the thorns could be exterminated. Spiritual culture is one part of the task which brings the harvest of the truth.

5. In every congregation to-day these kinds of hearers are represented. The truth cannot penetrate the critical hearer: he is encased in his shell of conceit. It soon perishes in the worldly mind: "the cares of the world" choke it. It has no root in those who have "no root in themselves." It is much to those who bring much readiness to "hear and do" what they hear (Heb. ii. 1, 2).

LESSON VIII.

THE BROAD AND THE NARROW ROAD.

(Matthew vii. 13, 14.)

LESSON TEXT.—"Though he was a son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered."—HEB. v. 8.

I. THE RECORD.

In Matthew it is simply a detached and complete exhortation to the safe and difficult methods of the kingdom of God, contrasted with the easy but dangerous opportunities of the immediately pleasant living according to one's own will. But in Luke we have a context (Luke xiii. 22). Jesus is going from city to city, teaching, as he approaches Jerusalem. In one of these places the question is asked him, "Master, are they few that be saved?" The parable of Matthew's record now takes the form, "Strive to enter in by the narrow door; for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able" (Luke xiii. 24). Then follows an application of this precept in which the finality of the judgment is impressed on the hearers (read Luke xiii. 25-30), ending with the declaration, "There are last which shall be first; and there are first which shall be last" (verse 30).

II. THE MEANING.

It is difficult to determine whether the reference in Luke is to the kingdom of God — the Messianic era — or also to the future state of final retribution. Perhaps it is not important to determine this question. It in no way affects the intention of the great Teacher; for Jesus answers the question, "Are they few that be saved?" not by the statement there are few or many, but that salvation is not a matter of numbers or of arbitrary selection, but they are saved who have fulfilled the conditions implied in "striving to enter in by the narrow door." The points of contrast in Luke's account are between the two words "strive" and "seek." The words *ἀγωνίζυμαι* and *ζητέω* differ in intensity: the first might be expressed by its English equivalent "to agonize," being derived from *ἀγών*, the stadium, in which the races were run and athletic struggle takes place; while *ζητέω* might be rendered by "seek with desire," "attempt," or some less robust word than "struggle" implies. Here lies the contrast in the passage: Struggle to enter — force the way through — the narrow door; for many will attempt to enter, desire what is beyond the entrance, apply for entrance, "and *shall not be able*" to press through an entrance so narrow. It is a figure of physical urgency under great limitations, but beyond lies the kingdom of God.

The account given in Matthew preserves an answer to the question, "Are they few that be saved?" by the declaration, "Few there be that find it"; and of "wide gate" and "the broad way" it is said, "Many there be that go in thereat." Whether this was in the original answer or not, still the idea is kept well forward that

ability to be saved depends upon fulfilling conditions imposed at the entrance upon the kingdom of God. The word here translated "strive" occurs not many times in the New Testament, but always in the sense of desperate effort, as in 1 Cor. ix. 25; 1 Tim. vi. 12,—"*Fight* the good *fight*"; so also 2 Tim. iv. 7.

The passage in Matthew, which is the parable of this lesson, does not deal with the kingdom of God in phraseology, but calls the heavenly kingdom, the reign of goodness which Jesus announced, "the way which *leadeth unto life*." Its opposite is called "*destruction*." This is the phraseology most natural to the teaching of Jesus. He says, "I came that they might have life, and have it more abundantly." The Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. The emphasis is always upon "life," here and now: the eternal life begins thus. He does not promise rewards, but promises that a certain order of life, behavior, character, condition, is the reward for which men would do well to agonize. It is not an easy task, but it "leadeth unto life."

"Heaven sometimes hedges a rare character about with ungainliness and odium, as the burr that protects the fruit."—*Emerson.*

The Book of Proverbs iv. 25-27 says how this entering into life seemed to one who spoke long before the time of Jesus. So also Aristotle in his Ethics says, "One may go wrong in many different ways, but right only in one; and so the former is easy, the latter difficult,—easy to miss the mark, hard to hit it."

III. Topics for Study.

1. Why is the entrance into wrong easy, and into right difficult?

2. Is not the difference in the *entrance only?* Are not the conditions reversed after that? If not, what did Jesus mean by "his peace," "his joy"? and what is the meaning of that fine passage in the Epistle to Hebrews which is applied to Christ: "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity: therefore, God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows"?

3. If Jesus was a glad and joyous man, what did he mean by constantly enjoining self-denial?

4. What is the essential thought in self-denial? Is it compatible with great joy "entering into life"? (1 John v. 3.)

5. How may duty become delight?

6. Observe the doctrine of "the two ways" taught in "The Teaching of the Twelve."

7. What is meant by Browning in the lines:—

> "Ask thy lone soul what laws are plain to thee,—
> Thee, and no other! Stand or fall by them!
> That is the part for thee."

8. Is the entrance "broad" or "narrow" for all alike? Is not the entrance difficult for some which is easy for others? (Matt. xix. 24.)

9. Is not the entrance which leadeth unto life *possible* to all?

10. Are we not bound to make it easier for others by removing part of their difficulties? Apply to social conditions.

LESSON IX.

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN.

(Luke xvii. 9–14.)

LESSON TEXT.—"Not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think."—ROM. xii. 3.

I. THE RECORD.

Told only in Luke's Gospel, and is characteristic of this which is called "The Gospel of the Son of Man." It is like the parable of "The Chief Seats" at the wedding-feast (Luke xiv. 7-11), and ends with the same moral law, "He that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." It finds its natural application in the incident which follows it,—Christ blessing little children; for the whole purpose of the parable is to show that THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS FOR THE MEEK.

II. THE MEANING.

The picture is very graphic. The two figures are set against the background of the Temple, and stand out apart from each other in the worship at the hour of prayer. The Pharisee, "the separatist," *planted himself*, as the word implies,—*posed, took his stand*, and prayed with himself. The Publican retired to an inconspicuous place, and confessed his sins. The Pharisee's prayer was a mental review of his virtues, a congratulation of himself on doing more than his duty. He called the notice of God to himself. The Publican turned his eyes upon himself, and pleaded with God to mercifully regard him.

The Pharisee dealt in a negative summing up of what he *was not*,—"not like the rest of men," not "an extortioner," "an adulterer," nor "unjust." He certainly was mistaken in himself, for his want of justice toward "this Publican" and "the rest of men" was very manifest.

He "fasted twice in the week" (Mondays and Thursdays), though his law required only one fast in the year, that on the great day of atonement.

He gave a "*tenth* of everything which he acquired," though the law only exacted a tenth of the fruit of the field and the flocks (Lev. xxvii. 30–32; Num. xviii. 21–24).

So he was not only holier than "the rest of men," but wiser than Moses as to what God required. He had estimated his mind and morals at a great price. Most men prided themselves on keeping the Law: this man prided himself on bettering the Law.

The prayer was mental, not announced, but a private estimate of a self-complacent mind, and so sincere, even if mistaken.

The contempt of the phrase "nor even as this Publican" showed a strange estimate of God's regard for persons.

The Publicans belonged to a despised class, but were not necessarily evil. They followed a calling which was unpatriotic, as it made the Jew serve the Roman for gain; and they were apt to be extortioners and unjust in the effort to make up the sum which they had paid for the privilege of farming the Imperial taxes.

III. Topics for Study.

State how the sect of the Pharisees arose, how they differed from the Sadducees. Which seemed most to antagonize the work of Jesus? Which was most regarded by the people, and what part did each take in religious service?

How far does a man's occupation reflect his character? *What* he does we might not choose to do, but *how* he does it we might well imitate.

Jesus, although the "best of men," did not depart from his humility. See scene at his baptism, the washing of the disciples' feet (John xiii. 1–10). Compare Luke xxii. 24–27.

> "The best of men
> That e'er wore earth about him was a sufferer;
> A soft, meek, patient, humble, tranquil spirit.
> The first true gentleman that ever breathed."
>
> *Thomas Dekker*, 1641.

For Jesus' treatment of Publicans see Matt. ix. 10–13; Luke vii. 34; Matt. xxi. 31, 32; Luke v. 27–35; Luke xix. 1–10.

IV. Suggested Laws of Life.

No virtues can be admirable which beget pride of self and contempt of the rest of men.

Every man must find God for himself. No path can be pointed out for him to follow. Humility is his preparation, and sincerity his temper: God himself is his reward.

Our standard of excellence is in God alone. "Be ye perfect [full, sphered, complete], even as your Father in heaven is perfect." Not as perfect as God, but as perfect, in our God-likeness, as men.

The method of Jesus: to encourage the sinner to leave his sin; to warn the self-righteous to deny himself; to put the emphasis on the thought of each about himself as indicating how he thought of God.

Justification is rightening, lifting to uprightness. The field of it is in (*a*) the soul of man, (*b*) the life of man, (*c*) the thought of God. It is not something God does independently or officially or legally. It is a state of grace in man, which reflects the character of God.

Real humility thanks God, not for what it is not, but for what it is by his grace. 1 Cor. xv. 9, 10; 2 Cor. x. 12; 1 Tim. i. 15, 16; Psalm li. 6–17; Isa. lvii. 15, lxvi. 2.

It requires courage to confess sin. "The essence of repentance is courage,"—courage to love the better life, to believe it possible, to believe God will aid to reach it, and to turn away from evil. The Publican agreed that he was what men thought him to be, and asked God to make him what God would have him to be.

LESSON X.

REVIEW.

I. The General Subject and the Relation of its Parts.

The kingdom of Heaven has been the general subject,—how the kingdom of Heaven was presented in the teaching of Jesus, as shown by the parables, in the lessons already studied, as the "pearl of great price," "the hid treasure," "the house on the rock," "the leaven," "the mustard-seed," "the talents," "the sower," "the broad and narrow way," and "the Pharisee and the Publican." The kingdom of Heaven, or the republic of God, is to be the reign of perfect goodness in the world. It ceases to be technical, Messianic, and local, and becomes a part of that order of nature which is really the revelation of the will of God. The theocracy of the Jews becomes the Theism of the Christian. Christian Theism is the will of God operative in the world, according to the life of Jesus Christ,—"The Laws of the Spirit according to the mind of Christ," as James Hamilton Thom expresses it. The kingdom of God is the synonyme for perfected religion in the world. The comparisons which Jesus made became the expression of our present experience of the religious life, as, for instance, in Lesson II. we have the immeasurable worth of goodness; in Lesson III., the immovable foundations of goodness; in Lesson IV., the silent extension of goodness from within; in Lesson V., the growth of goodness in the world from small beginnings; in Lesson VI., the reward of goodness in proportion not to what we have, but what we are; in Lesson VII., by prayer the soul is brought in contact with the rule of righteousness, and how it fails to produce righteousness in an unprepared soul is shown. The struggle by narrow ways to broad experience is in Lesson VIII., and the divine regard for the righteousness of the heart and of the life is seen in Lesson IX.

II. Suggested Topics.

1. Has the growth of civilization justified Jesus' estimate of the worth of the kingdom of Heaven? All motives must be judged by two standards, the *strength* of the motive and the *worth* of the motive.

2. How does the "house on the rock" throw light upon the difference between a theory of religion and religion itself?

3. The growth suggested in the parable of the mustard-seed and the leaven depends upon the power of the soul more than on the energy brought into it. They are a study of conditions of nature. The seed will not grow if laid upon the rock, and the leaven must be hid in the meal. (Deal with the question of religion from within, as developing as a part of our nature, and the other more common aspect of religion, as brought in from the outside, as something added to our nature.) Which do you think gives the best results, and which is truer to the facts of experience?

4. The great doctrine of responsibility that is taught in the "talents" and in the "sower" needs careful study and enlargement.

"We are not free, but we are free to be made free." — *T. T. Lynch.*

5. Carefully discriminate between "the broad way," that is part of the soul, on the one hand, and license of conduct, on the other; also "the narrow way" that is strictness of conscience, on the one hand, and fear, growing out of want of trust, on the other.

6. In the Pharisee and in the Publican is shown an illustration of the saying of Fontenelle, that "God made man in his own image, and man has been returning the compliment ever since by making God in his." Distinguish always well and clearly between the Reality and man's definition of the Reality. The definition never can be the thing itself.

III. QUESTIONS.

In which parables do we learn the importance of sacrifice, the obligation of self-denial, and what are the limitations and obligations implied?

Do these parables magnify or lessen the dignity of human nature?

Would you say that they teach that man needs to be saved by something outside of himself, or that he is capable by the law of his nature to bring about his own salvation?

What do they teach that salvation really is?

What social conditions are outlined in these parables, and what are the reasons to be drawn from these conditions?

Is the teaching of these parables, for the most part, theological or ethical?

Do they make a strong distinction between morals and religion, or do they show that religion is based in morals, and that morals have their inspiration from religion?

Do you believe from the teaching of these parables that the ethics of Jesus can be made the law of human conduct now?

If not, why not?

And, if so, how?

Have the ethics of Jesus been outgrown, or have we not yet grown up to his standard? (Eph. iv. 13.)

Contrast each of the characteristics of the kingdom of Heaven in the parables with the present condition of things. How can we inaugurate a change?

How do the various plans for the betterment of society expect to bring about the Heavenly kingdom? Are not some of these ready-made plans only another form of selfishness?

LESSON XI.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

(Luke x. 25–27.)

LESSON TEXT.—"Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy."—MATT. v. 7.

I. THE OCCASION OF THE PARABLE.

A scribe asked Jesus what he should "do to inherit eternal life." He is referred to his own knowledge for his answer, "What saith the law, how readest thou?" He quotes in reply a part of the Shemah, which every Jew uttered each day as the creed of his religion. He combines with it the other phrase, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," showing in this that he apprehended the teaching of Jesus, that the heavenly side of religion is not complete without the human side. If he had left out this second utterance, probably Jesus would have supplied it. But, as he had expressed himself fully as to the duty to God and the obligation to man, Jesus answered, "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live." That he was not entirely free from the critical tendency of his class is shown by the fact that this scribe desires to enter into a discussion, not of eternal life, nor of the nature of God, nor of the scope of life; but it is added, "He, desiring to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?" The answer of the great Teacher is this parable. It is a picture drawn with a strong hand, omitting every unnecessary detail not adding to the effect of the scene, to present the three figures, the priest and the Levite passing off the stage to make room for the real "neighbor" to do what their profession would have indicated they should do.

Jesus does not answer the question of the scribe directly, but asks another question, "Who was neighbor to him who fell among thieves?" Of which the only answer is, the obvious one, "He that showed mercy upon him." To which Jesus replies, "Go thou, and do likewise."

II. COMMENTARY.

The parable may be said to mean "charity, the true sanctity" (Bruce). It is to be regarded from the standpoint of the kingdom of heaven, as Jesus interpreted it, that "eternal life" is the inheritance of eternal character; that "eternal life" is not different from life "in time," except as the æon differs from the instant, which reminds one of the old mathematical definition that a "line is a point in motion." This is the ever-recurring teaching of the New Testament, that *we are in heaven*, that "eternal life" has already begun to the heavenly soul, who is living the life of God. Jesus speaks of himself as the Son of man who is in heaven, even thus while he lived on earth.

It is still further the meaning of this parable that making the world a better place to live in is the only way to show that one is fit to live in any better place. The whole purpose of the mission of Jesus is seen, not only in this purpose, but all that he says and does is to show the compassion of God in the ministering to God's children. The early Church understood this, and did not begin to talk about the orthodox or apostolic doctrine until the middle of the second century, but devoted itself to making a clean centre of wholesome life in the midst of the corrupt age to which he came. Its purpose was ethical, not doctrinal;

and each revolution of the age was achieved, not by changing its views, but by regenerating its life.

An essential teaching of this parable lies in the clever change of phrase which many commentaries miss, by virtue of which Jesus shifts the emphasis in his question from the point on which the scribe had laid it. "He, willing to justify himself, asks, Who is my neighbor?" that is, I am willing to love my neighbor as myself, if I am assured upon whom the love is to be bestowed. Jesus pays no attention to his inquiry, whom he shall love, but asks, Who is the loving man? not the loved man; and he says that the neighbor is the man who shows compassion, not the man who needs it. Nothing could be more characteristic of the method of Christ than just this turning of the whole moral situation. It seems to have closed the conversation between Christ and the scribe.

Equally important is the word of Jesus with respect to what he means by the "fitness for eternal life," "to live to God," which in the Shemah is phrased as the absorbing passion, and "to live for man," which in the corresponding phrase is stated as "engrossing as any selfishness can be": "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," this statement wins from Christ the approval, "This do, and thou shalt live." It is a parallel to the story concerning Hillel, who uttered these two summaries of the law to the man who asked to be taught the whole law, while he stood on one foot. When Hillel had uttered these words, here offered by the scribe, he said, "This is the whole law: the rest is commentary."

III. Topics for Study.

What were the differences between the duties of the priests and of the Levites in the services of the Temple? What is meant by the course of the priests, as in Luke i, 5, 8, 9? Note the effect of routine religious observances in hardening the heart, so that the wounded man made no appeal which aroused compassion. Who were the Samaritans? Why were they the object of Jesuit hatred? (For the estimate of it see John viii. 48. For a more tolerant view of the Samaritans see Luke xvii. 11–19.) (Even here Jesus speaks of them as "aliens.") (For valuable note on origin and nationality of the Samaritans see Trench's "Parables," p. 316.)

What made the Samaritan's services show so in contrast to the hard-heartedness of the priest and the Levite? (For Jewish law of humanity see Ex. xxiii. 5; Deut. xxii. 4. For the difference between "formalism" and "mercy" see splendid passage Isa. lviii. 3–8. Compare with Matt. ix. 13, xii. 7.) Would the conduct of the Samaritan be regarded as unusual now? Give striking example of the growth in human character in these later times. Dean Stanley says, "This parable has been the consolation of the wanderer, and the support of the outcast and heretic in every age and country." It may be added it is almost a decree of judgment against the professional hardness of men in holy service. How insidious intolerance is may be seen in the fact that Archbishop Trench, in speaking of the merits of the Catholic commentator, Maldonatus, could not refrain from calling him the "intolerant and abusive Jesuit." The Samaritan was spoken of by the Jew as an idolater, he was cursed publicly in the synagogue, the Jew prayed that he might have no portion in the resurrection of life. Under no conditions would he admit him as a proselyte, refusing to receive his testimony on trial. The man who entertained a Samaritan in his house did so with the risk that it would be a judgment upon his children, and it was as objectionable to eat a Samaritan's food as to eat swine's flesh. He would accept no benefaction at the hands of the Samaritan. In travelling through Galilee to Jerusalem, he would sometimes cross the Jordan, to the eastern side, that he might not have to pass through the Samaritan country. All of which hatred and ill-will the Samaritan commonly returned with interest.

Note.—This parable must be treated from the standpoint of Jesus and the scribe, and not be confused by any ancient or modern evangelical fictions based upon it, such as speaking of the oil as the "anointing of the holy spirit" and the wine as "the blood of Christ," as used by Chrysostom, repeated by Archbishop Trench. This beautiful and simple story has been often made the ground of what might be called the very dissoluteness of doctrinal speculation.

LESSON XII.

THE SHEPHERD AND HIS FLOCK.

(John x. 1-16.)

LESSON TEXT.—"I am the Good Shepherd."—JOHN x. 11.

I. THE RECORD.

Although the parable occurs only in John's gospel, the idea which it involves is familiar to all parts of the New Testament, and became a favorite statement in the early church, to express, in hymn, and carving, and painting, the relation between Christ and his followers. So also in the Old Testament we have the same relation expressed between Jehovah and his people (compare 1 Kings xxii. 17 with Matt. ix. 36). It easily fitted the Jewish mind, not only because of the pastoral features of their life, but because of the weaving into their poetry and prophecy the remembrance of the shepherd king, David (read 1 Sam. xvi. and xvii).

The parable as given in John's gospel presents the familiar picture of oriental pastoral life. The shepherd goes into the fold where are many flocks, and is known by his own sheep, which he calls by their names; and they respond to the familiar voice with perfect confidence. He does not drive them, fearing, before him. He goes before them and leads them, faces their dangers in advance, and guides them to the pastures. Between the shepherd and the sheep is perfect confidence. The shepherd's devotion is taught in a yet plainer way in the beautiful parable of the lost sheep, given in Luke xv.

II. THE MEANING.

It is a rather surprising statement made in verse 6 of the lesson. The explanation which follows confuses the figure, because the parable and the explanation probably do not arise from the same source.

The Messianic character of the other gospels is strongly Jewish, where John's gospel tends to impress the universality of religion. Belonging to Judaism had been the exclusive test: now belonging to Christ became the test for salvation. In the parable, the shepherd enters the door of the sheepfold by virtue of his right to the sheep. In the explanation (verses 7–9) the shepherd becomes the door, and is the only means of safety for the sheep. Jesus would not have said, "All that came before me are thieves and robbers." It would not have been just and it was not true. Remember the splendid line of prophet-shepherds, and John the Baptizer, whom Jesus followed for a time, and then succeeded. But, when this gospel of John's was written, there had been several pretender-Messiahs who had led the sheep astray, and finally brought permanent disaster to the nation. (See accounts of Theudas (about A.D. 44–48), and "the Egyptian"

(Acts xxi.; Josephus, "Wars of the Jews," ii.), and most formidable and most disastrous Bar Chochba. For these consult Schürer, "Jewish People," Division I., vol. ii.). The explanation also emphasizes the shepherd's devotion and the "hireling's" cowardice, and contains doubtless an implication based upon the history of the earlier persecutions of the Christians, in which some "fled" at the approach of "the wolf" to "devour the sheep." Here, also, we get a glimpse of the contending claims of simple devotion to Christ, "the Door," and substitutes for this devotion which were offered by philosophy and compromise among those to whom this gospel of John came. There are traces here, as elsewhere, in Acts and the Epistles, of the conflict between the Jerusalem-party and the party of Paul; and the universality of Christ's mission appears in the beautiful use of the figure (verse 16), "Other sheep I have which are not of this *fold*; them also I must bring (or lead), and they shall hear my voice; and they shall become *one flock*, one shepherd."

NOTE.—Although the revisers of the New Testament had many of them steadily acted upon the supposition that there was but *one* "*fold*," they were compelled by the simple appeal to the Greek text of the New Testament to correct the reading of verse 16 and give the early Christian ideal of "*one flock*" in *many folds*.

III. SUGGESTED TOPICS.

1. The safety of the sheep is in proportion to their obedience to the shepherd. Their liberty "to go in and out" is connected with knowing his voice from that of a stranger. Large liberty and perfect loyalty are entirely consistent.

2. In what does following the Good Shepherd consist? Is it by a hard road?

3. In what sense is Jesus able to lay down his life and yet be the means of abundant life to his flock? What does the word "peculiar" originally mean, as used in Titus ii. 14 (Authorized Version)?

4. Would Jesus be a better leader if he uttered verse 8 or if he uttered verse 16? Could he be the author of both statements? (See Matthew Arnold's "The Good Shepherd with the Kid.")

5. What is the real use of the Good Shepherd to the flock? Can he do more than defend them while they are fed, not by his hand, but on the pasture *he discovers for them?* Are not shepherd and sheep both related to the great Life which they share? "If Jesus is to be the leader of this age, it will be because *he leads*."

LESSON XIII.

THE LABORERS IN THE VINEYARD.

(Matthew xx. 1-16.)

LESSON TEXT.—"We are God's fellow-workers."—1 COR. iii. 9.

I. THE RECORD

Is in Matthew's gospel alone, and the figure of agricultural labor in illustration of the kingdom of Heaven is not often repeated. It is used several times in connection with vine-dressing, but in a climate so genial nature asked little help from man. But the idea of service here implied is a very common one. Jesus says of himself, "I am among you as one that serveth"; and everywhere appears the idea of co-operation in work and the sharing of duties, rising to that highest conception of the dignity of work seen in Paul's fine saying, "We are laborers together with God" (1 Cor. iii. 9).

II. THE MEANING.

The kingdom of God is here represented as claiming the service of those whose *fidelity* was to be the test of character and efficiency. This parable does not present the kingdom of Heaven as growing by inward power, as in the story of the Leaven or that of the Mustard Seed, but brought to its perfection by the help of the members of that kingdom. Here God and man work together. God gives the opportunity, and man works to the opportunity; and *how* he works, not *how long* he works, is the measure of his reward. Those who are early hired make a contract with "the lord of the vineyard" for a just wage: those who make no bargain trust to the justice of the master. The result shows that quality of service fixes its own reward, and cannot justly be the ground of envy with those who get what they bargained for. "The evil eye" of the envious could not accuse the right of the master to give for the service of an hour what the others bargained to take for the work of the day. It is not a lesson in "economics of industry," but in the *investment of character as capital.* This is shown by the following analysis: The work was in the same place, but may not have been for all the same work. The wage was the same in each case, but in one it may have been paid for time and in another for brains. Those who worked all day got what they demanded; those who worked a less time received what they earned. The standard of service is not in those "called," but in those "chosen" ones who make good the call. Those who worked one hour had no "call" to work before ("No man hath hired us"), but they seized the opportunity when it came.

III. SUGGESTED TOPICS.

1. Does God need our work, or has he so ordered his world that we may have the honor of helping him?

2. The kingdom of God on earth is the kingdom of man, and all its work and worth can be known only by the revealing of man to man. We do not know what or how God works without man: what we know must be in terms of humanity.

3. Work always waits for workers: the work is never done (Luke x. 2). But we must put ourselves where we can hear the call to work, and be ready to go at once (Luke xiv. 16–24).

4. We speak of the dignity of labor; the dignity does not depend on the kind of work, but on the style in doing it. Its place also in the whole scheme of the world's work adds to its worth.

5. We show our incapacity to fill our own place and reap our own reward when we feel envy of another's lot. Goodness in another sometimes seems to bring out our own lack of it.

6. What does verse 15 teach? Is there here any excuse for trusting to fate or Calvin's God? Compare verses 15, 16, with Rom. ix. 21.

LESSON XIV.

THE TEN VIRGINS.

(Matthew xxv. 1–13.)

LESSON TEXT.—"What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch!"—MARK xiii. 37.

I. THE RECORD.

Only found in Matthew's gospel. It is one of the so-called "judgment parables." It deals with the standards of fidelity, not as to work, as in the parable of the Laborers, but as to waiting and watching for the fit moment to join the forces working for the kingdom of Heaven. None of these parables of judgment are meant to be interpreted as referring to the future state after death. "The end of the age," so often referred to, is that which precedes Messiah's kingdom. Jesus believed that the kingdom of God was to be on the earth among men. The early *church* lost sight of the *immediateness* of it, and *expected it "to come."* This error gradually grew into that great mistake of placing the expectation beyond life in a remote heaven. The parable of the Ten Virgins looks like a part of the expectation of the time after Jesus was taken from his disciples. "They stood gazing into heaven" (Acts i. 11) from some part of the Christian church for three centuries after the death of Jesus, expecting his return. It was an idleness, based upon a mistake of what Jesus meant by the kingdom of Heaven.

II. THE MEANING.

The parable preserves the conditions surrounding an oriental wedding. The bridegroom is about to claim his bride. The bride's friends prepare to light him to her dwelling. Five of the young girls who are to bear the lamps before him have calculated upon delay, and prepare to wait until daylight, if necessary: they have taken "oil in the vessels with their lamps." The other five are ready when night comes on, but not ready for a long delay. Their lamps burned out. They were willing, but not wise. They were not wicked, only foolish. They assumed to know when the bridegroom would come, and prepared accordingly for no patient vigil. They were willing to borrow of the wise, and so render all foolish by making all dark. They went to buy for themselves, and "the door was shut." Those who were ready went in; and those who came at last with relighted lamps were denied entrance, as they had failed in the one thing they had promised to do,— light the path for the bridegroom. They had not lighted the path to the marriage, and now they were not needed in the house where all was light and joy.

The point in the story of the laborers in the vineyard was faithful activity. Here it is faithfulness while waiting to serve, according to Milton's line, "They also serve who only stand and wait."

III. Suggested Topics.

1. Because the kingdom of God does not come at once, it is not wise of us to despond or to relax our vigilance. "*The possible always is,*" says James Martineau.

2. We must have resources of character in reserve for a time of strain. The hollow square waits the shock which the cavalry charge carries forward. Patience requires more courage than activity (Heb. x. 36; Col. i. 11).

3. The whole preparation of a lifetime is sometimes necessary for a supreme moment of trial. We know then what it all means. We cannot supplement neglect of fitness, preparation, and resource at the moment when the crisis is on us.

4. The issue of our career depends on no arbitrary decree. There is a law of cause and effect in character and personal history. Late repentance seems not to make up lost opportunity.

5. There is no teaching here as to retribution in a future state. The many sermons which have taken "the shut door" for exclusion from God's presence destroy God instead of the soul, for they declare that there is a part of God's world in which he is not "who filleth all things." This and parables like it are not pictures of the Last Judgment, but fundamental principles on which character and privilege depend. There can be no *last* judgment in the sense of finality, so long as humanity lasts and God is.

6. There is a fate which attends upon a loss of function. This is what is meant by "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "The single," undimmed "eye" makes the whole body full of light. The "salt is good"; but, "if it lose its saltness, it is good for nothing." When we cannot do that we were created to accomplish, we may well say, "The door is shut." Our wisdom is in our preparation for fulfilling the will of God. Our foolishness is in "sinning against our own souls."

LESSON XV.

A LIGHTED CANDLE.

(Matthew v. 15, 16, and Luke viii. 16.)

LESSON TEXT.—"Walk as children of light."—EPH. v. 8

I. THE RECORD.

A part of the Sermon on the Mount, standing in Luke's gospel as an introduction to the statement of the revealing of all things hid and the sharp responsibility for our opportunities. (See Luke viii. 16.) In Matthew the light of the world is put as one of the saving and helping agencies appointed of God. It follows the statement about the salt of the earth. The salt preserves from decay, the light drives away darkness. The one makes all things wholesome, the other makes all things safe and vital. The salt must not "lose its savor," the light must "not be hid."

II. THE MEANING

Turns on the fact that the kingdom of God is announced as good news of God, a revelation of the Father's will which shall dissipate gloom and make us "light in the Lord." John calls "the Word" "the Intelligence of life" (John i.), the true light, which lighteth every man. Jesus announces that he is "the light of the world" (John viii. 12), that the light is to be with them only a little while (John xii. 35), but then the disciples are to become "the light of the world" in their turn (Matt. v. 14). The subjects of the divine kingdom are to walk as children of light (Eph. v. 8). They must put on the armor of light (Rom. xiii. 12). And all this has its source in the fact that "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John i. 5). So that the first business of religion, in the estimation of Jesus, the Revealer, is to make things plain by reason of the new light of life (John viii. 12). When the kingdom shall be established, and the New Jerusalem "descends out of heaven from God," it will be seen shining clear, "There shall be no night there" (Rev. xxii. 5).

III. SUGGESTED TOPICS.

1. All light is one in kind: it differs in clearness, purity, and degree. It is not always from its original source: it may be by reflection. But it is originally one.

2. We are not creators of light, but its bearers. We are kindled at the source of light. The power to kindle us is in God: ours is the power to shine, being kindled.

3. We keep near the source of light, and carry it near to those who are in darkness; for the power to illuminate is, according to the law of light, "inversely as the square of the distance" between the light-bearer and the object it enlightens.

"Let the light *so shine* that men may see."

4. What they are to see is not us, but the good works on which we cast the light. Men learn how to do God's will by seeing it done. The "good works" are ours: the honor is God's, whose workmanship we are. We are worked upon. It is "God that worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. ii. 13). But he works secretly in us what we are to work out in the light.

5. To make a discovery in the art of living, and then to keep it to ourselves, is to be disloyal to the truth. A man may find God for himself, but he is bound to help him "who walks in darkness and has no light."

6. Whatever obscures the character of God, or casts a shadow on the path of life, is opaque, dull, and darkening. It is not a candle, "giving light to all that are in the house."

7. The world needs light. All else follows when light is given. See the parable of the Genesis (Gen. i. 3, 4, etc.).

8. Personal experience is the sum of our experiments to bring light to bear on life's obscure perplexities. Given a clear eye and a clear light, and we own the beauty of the world.

LESSON XVI.

THE GREAT SUPPER.

(Luke xiv. 15-24.)

LESSON TEXT.—"They shall come from the east and west, and from the north and south, and shall sit down in the kingdom."—LUKE xiii. 29.

I. THE RECORD.

This is one of the most natural recitals concerning the relations of Jesus to the men about him. The place is the house of one of the chief Pharisees; the time, the Sabbath; the occasion, a social meal. But, although Jesus was partaking of hospitality, there were those present who "were watching him": he was likely to be "wounded in the house of his friends." He seems quite conscious of the situation; he is, as always, the knight without fear and without reproach. He is as quick to relieve distress as to reprove pride and wickedness; so he cures the sick man in spite of Sabbath slavery to custom and tradition, and points the application of his teaching by reminding the quibbling scribes that he has done for a child of God what any man would do for his own beast, if it were helplessly placed, on the Sabbath day (verse 6).

He then gave them a point in social manners, which had to to do with personal morals. He saw them crowding for the best places, where the more honorable guests were placed or the company would be first served. He reminds them that being exalted or humbled is to be the result of character, and cannot be altered finally by crowding for the best places. A man may be able to push many things forward, but he cannot "push *himself* forward," in spite of the common saying. He can *go forward* if he has strength. He now turns his attention to the man who had bidden him to the supper, and suggests to him that in serving his friends and kindred he is likely to overlook those who have no friends, and are alone in the world without helpers,—"the poor, blind, and lame," (verses 12-14), and reminds these scribes of one of their own comments as to the portion of the merciful in "the resurrection of the just" (verse 14).

At this point one of the company utters a very complacent word of self-satisfaction: "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" He had been kindled to enthusiasm by the accumulating moral passion of the occasion, and to his imagination he saw the kingdom of Messiah as at hand. The kingdom of Heaven seemed to him sure and near.

To him Jesus addresses the parable of the Great Supper, given by a certain man who sent out many invitations and made splendid preparation. Apparently the invitations were not declined; but, when the date set for the supper arrived, they seem to have conspired to defeat the generous purpose of the entertainer. They all began with one consent to make excuse, as in the parable of the Marriage of the King's Son (Matt. xxii. 1-14). They made light of it. Though they did not treat the messengers so brutally, they very rudely gave insufficient reasons for not caring for the supper or its provider.

One said he had bought a field, and could not wait from seeing it; of course it would have been there *just the same after supper*. Another wanted to yoke up ten oxen he had bought, and he must be excused. It was not that there was work which needed

his attention, but he wanted to try (prove) his oxen. The third man had married a wife, it would seem quite suddenly, as he offers this as a reason for not going to the supper, though he knew of it some time before. It is not surprising that the master of the house was angry; but he is not so angry as to lose a chance to do good, so he sends a cordial invitation to the wayfarers and street people, and keeps up his urgency until there is not a place vacant at table. The statement (verse 24), "None of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper," would indicate that the excuses were requests for delay. They would come when they had nothing better to do. Probably the hungry people brought in had the satisfaction of seeing their disappointment later, when everything had been eaten up.

II. The Meaning.

It is a parable of the kingdom of Heaven and the possibility of not being included finally in its provision, though invited at first and first of all as the Jews had been. They were called chosen people,— God's own nation. But they had put other things in place of the great design, the generous provision to which they had been invited. Read the lament of Jesus (Matt. xxiii. 29–39). The original design of God's providence, it is implied in the New Testament, was to bless all men *through* the Jewish nation. "Salvation is of the Jews", said John's gospel.

But this parable teaches, like Rom. xi. 15, that the message of good will would be published to the gentiles, since God's chosen people resisted the testimony of God, and declined the gracious invitation. This lament of Jesus over the obduracy of his people is repeated many times in the prophecies of the Old Testament. In the practice of religion in his time Jesus found many things substituted for the will of God, and a prevailing doubt as to the need of devotion immediately to that will.

III. Suggested Topics.

1. God's plans do not fail, though we fail of their benefit.
2. The extension of all mercy to the needy is the ultimate purpose of the kingdom of Heaven on earth.
3. We are to be his messengers who first have heard the message.
4. Note in the parable of the Great Wedding (Matt. xxii.) how much more human the tone in Luke's gospel is. It is "the gospel of the Son of man."

LESSON XVII.

THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES.

(John xv. 1-9.)

Lesson Text.—"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit."—John xv. 8.

I. The Record.

This parable of the Vine and the Branches is not connected with anything which goes before it. The chapter preceding it seems to close the Last Supper scene, and the parallel passages in the other gospels require that the scene in Gethsemane should follow. The chapters beginning with John xv. to the close of chapter xvii. seem to be inserted as the commentary upon the relation of Jesus to his disciples and of both to God, their Father.

II. The Meaning.

There is a meditative quality about this parable of the Vine and the Branches that forbids us to think of it as spoken in an impulsive way, like the parable of the Sower, or as a plea for the higher life, like the parable of the Prodigal. It sounds as though it were a reflection of the figure used by Jesus, which the group of his disciples worked out later in their struggle to hold their own against the world, and to hold themselves loyal in their devotion to Christ himself. It carries the color of the thinking that runs all through the gospel of John, in that it suggests an intimate union between Christ and his disciples, but a more than intimate relation between Christ and the Father, but still teaches, as the gospel of John everywhere does, the subordination of Jesus to the Fatherhood of God.

The very first verse, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman," points to the dependence of Jesus himself upon the care and nurture at the hand of God. It teaches unmistakably that as the branch depends upon the vine for its vitality, and the fruit is the proof of that vitality, so the vine depends upon the husbandman for its cultivation.

It is difficult to imagine how any doctrine of the deity of Christ could have been based upon this statement of dependence on the Father, to whom he constantly refers his life and power. By "true vine" is meant a vine truly fruitful and capable of supplying every branch with sap. That some branches bear fruit and some do not is said to be due, not to unfruitfulness in the vine or neglect of the husbandman, but to a peculiarity in the branch itself. The branch that does not bear fruit is pruned away, and the one that does is cleansed, that its fruitfulness may the more immediately appear. The figure is carried out, so far as the disciples are concerned, by saying that the word of Jesus has been a regenerating word to them,—"Ye are made clean by the word which I have spoken unto you."

The personal relationship of Christ to the church is car-

ried out here very thoroughly. Surrounded by persecution, they are driven back upon their one resource in their Lord, who to their thought has departed only for a little while and will come again; and in the meantime they must show their relation to him by perpetuating his life among them,— here called "the fruit" which they bear. The Father is to be glorified just in proportion as the Father's children, represented here by the branches of the vine, shall be fruitful in a Christ-like life. It is even promised that abiding in Christ shall be a means of relation to God for procuring whatever they ask of God (verse 16). Every least detail of the figure put in this pictorial form must not be insisted upon, for it is quite possible by such a process to prove too much.

III. Suggested Topics.

How can a word spoken to another cleanse that other to whom it is spoken? It is said (John xvii. 19), "I sanctify myself, that they may be sanctified in the truth"; but in some instances this word did not cleanse those to whom it was spoken (John xvii. 12; John xii. 47, 48).

Note how entirely of the earth, in its origin and growth, the figure of the vine indicates the humanity of Jesus to be. The care which the Father exercised, like that of the husbandman upon the vine, only helps its natural fruitfulness by bringing it under conditions that are best to produce fruit. If the fourth gospel had meant to teach that the human teacher and leader of the disciples was in any sense extra-natural, it would not have been possible for them to use such a figure as that of the vine, which appears again and again in the literature of the earliest church fathers, and in the pictorial inscriptions upon the tombs of the martyrs and saints.

There seems to be intimated here also a warning of exclusion from Christ because of the failure to fulfil the obligation to bear Christ-like fruits. A very strong and wholesome suggestion is made in the fact that it is not the vine that bears the fruit: the vine only sustains the branch, and it is the branch that bears the fruit. If the spirit and work of Christ are ever to appear in the world, they would seem by this figure to be wholly dependent upon the fruitfulness in the Christ-like life of his disciples. What is in the root of the vine, and what is in the care of the husbandman, appear in the slightest and most remote tendril of the smallest branch.

In the distinction between "If ye abide in me and my words abide in you," by which verse 7 explains verse 4, note how entirely similar the relation of the branch that bears the fruit and the vine which bears the branch is to the husbandman, upon whom both depend. Note the transformation of the elements in the soil, by which the unsavory enrichment supplied to the root becomes the lusciousness of the fruit and the sparkle of the wine from it. Do you think that there is here any suggestion of the transformation which the human soul has the power to work upon the untoward and disagreeable discipline and conditions of life?

LESSON XVIII.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

(Luke xv. 11–32.)

LESSON TEXT.—"Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive."—PSALM lxxxvi. 5.

I. THE RECORD

Shows the occasion of this parable, together with those which speak of "the lost sheep" and "the lost coin." "All the publicans and sinners drew near to hear him"; and the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them," whereupon Jesus shows by the parables following that his attitude towards sinners is what he thinks the fatherhood of God requires of God's children. The children of God are to take pleasure in what gives joy in God's presence (verses 7, 10). The very mission of Jesus is involved in this parable. (See Matt. ix. 9–13; xviii. 21, 22; Luke xix. 7–10. Read the beautiful story, Luke, chapter xv.)

II. THE MEANING.

This is the most characteristic story, in which Jesus tells the relation between the soul and God. It is peculiar in having in the parable itself absolutely nothing about himself as the teacher or guide of men, and represents the kingdom of Heaven as a personal transaction, such as might occur in a household where a dissipated boy has been recovered to the love and care of the family. The omission of any reference to himself as the Son of the King, or the True Vine, or the Good Shepherd, or any other figure by which he has been accustomed to speak of himself as instrumental in bringing the kingdom of Heaven, leads us to measure the importance of the exposition by the interests of humanity which are portrayed upon the one side and the disposition of God towards them upon the other.

Primarily, of course, there was the purpose in this parable, as pointed out above, to show how Jesus regarded those who, like the Pharisees, were distinctly within the Jewish household, and those, who, like the publicans and sinners, had, either by their employments or their character, forfeited the right to be called true Jews.

His sympathies were with the suspected people, the despised, and those who had fallen under the social proscription. He was distinctly the burden-bearer for men; and his charge against the Pharisees that they had burdens to lift, and would not lift them with one of their fingers, sounds the utmost depth of his severity (Matt. xxiii. 1–14).

But this local reference to Pharisees and publicans as held by the older brother, who was always at home, and the younger brother, who had strayed into a far country and had fallen into unholy associations, is not the final thought or the primary meaning of the parable, for Jesus did not regard men as Pharisees and publicans, but as children of the living God; and their relation to the Father, and the good and joy of the Father's house, had a more than Jewish significance with him. It was part of his tribute to universal religion that men should be regarded as men. This parable, then, in its inmost meaning, is really the story of a soul's recovery to the favor of God; and it shows distinctly that that favor never was lost, though it had been abandoned by the erring soul.

The waywardness of the son appears in it, the unnaturalness of the perversion of nature, the retribution which follows excess and sinful indulgence, the degradation, which could be shown by no better figure than that a Jew should be set to feed swine. The hunger of the soul, as portrayed in this famished boy, the insanity of sin, appears in the declaration that "when he came to himself he said" the words of repentance. There is portrayed the humility which the sinful soul must feel with regard to God, as "not worthy to be called his son," though he is his son still. The willingness to do anything under the father's eye rather than enjoy the greatest delights away from the father's home appears also: "Make me as one of thy hired servants."

But all this upon the side of the soul's distressing need throws into greater contrast the statement that "when he was a great way off his father saw him." The watchfulness of love is intimated here, the undeviating kindness of God,—"His gifts are without repentance"; that is, God does not repent of having given anything, even when the gift is abused. The eagerness of love is in the running of the father to meet him, the embrace and kiss, taking no account of his poverty and rags. He is immediately restored to the household life. He is not put upon probation. He is completely trusted, as though he had not gone astray.

As in the previous parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin, Jesus shows that the one sheep that has gone astray was to be sought for, while the ninety and nine that had not gone astray were left standing to wait for his return; and that the house was to be swept diligently for the lost coin until it was found; and that the measure of joy over what was recovered was greater than that which could be inspired by a docile obedience, where there was no disposition to do wrong. So the joy in the household, "Let us eat and make merry," is in this parable parallel to the other parable, "I say unto you, There is joy in heaven before the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

III. Suggested Topics.

This parable undoubtedly gives the view which Jesus held as to the relation of the human soul to God, its recovery from sin, and restoration to relations of love with the Father. If this be so, is it not remarkable that *there is nothing in it which corresponds to the popular doctrines of the atonement?* There is no hint of sacrifice, there is no price paid but such as sin always causes the sinful to pay in suffering, there is no necessity to appease the wrath of the Father. There is no wrath in the Father, and no one comes between the Father and the sinner to plead his cause or to secure the Father's favor. The fact is that no one of the many theories which the church has held respecting the atonement has any justification in any word of Jesus. The word "atonement," which occurs so often in the Old Testament, is found but once in the New Testament (Rom. v. 11); and here the meaning is not that of Orthodox theology.

IV. Topics for Study.

Show what principal theories of the atonement have no share in the teaching of this parable. Why do they then persist in publishing them, and why are they taught by men of learning and piety? Note that in this parable Jesus does not lose sight of the heinousness of sin, but speaks of it as starving and poverty and degradation, and finally of the sinner as of one that was "lost" and was "dead," and that he is found and is alive again. Does the magnifying of God's mercy belittle the sinfulness of sin (Rom. ii. 4)?

LESSON XIX.

THE PRAYER OF JESUS.

(Matthew vi. 9-13; Luke xi. 1-4.)

LESSON TEXT.—"Thy kingdom come."—MATT. vi. 10.

I. THE RECORD.

The longer form in Matthew, the very brief form in Luke, not found in the other gospels. The occasion of the prayer is given in Matthew as a warning against vain repetitions, unmeaning ritual, or striving with God as though he were unwilling to hear. In Luke the prayer is given upon the request of the disciples, who, finding Jesus at prayer in a certain place, ask to be taught to pray, as John the Baptist had taught his disciples. In Luke it is followed by the parable of the friend at midnight, to show God's instant generosity in contrast to the niggardly and reluctant response of the householder in that parable. The argument is not for "importunity in prayer," but quite the reverse. It is not an argument based on comparison, but on contrast. Luke's version of the prayer ends with "bring us not into temptation [trial]." In neither gospel is the "Gloria" found which is in common use, and which fits the prayer so well. Note the argument as to God's ready hearing of prayer which follows in Luke's version, xi. 9-13.

II. THE MEANING.

The prayer is not new: its petitions may be found, for the most part, if not wholly, in the prayers which Jesus and his disciples, as Jews, were accustomed to utter. It can only be called distinctly the Lord's Prayer because the petitions were by him selected. The significance of this will appear if the student will turn to the historic prayers of the Jewish ritual. He will there see with what spiritual skill, what genius for the religious life, Jesus selected these gems of great price from the pebbles of that stream of Jewish devotion. There can be nothing new in the force of the spirit or of matter: new conditions, new uses, new adjustments, are all we can expect. The highest revelation which seems absolutely new is only the eye wider open or stronger in vision to see the thing that always was there. The telescope does not create the stars, it only reveals them.

Note in this prayer those things made the subject of petition. THE DECLARATION OF THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD. Luke's version simply gives "Father," and omits "who art in heaven." He is not remote in heaven, but his heaven is near; that is the Father in heaven, whose will is to be done on the earth as in heaven, so that no dark interval shall separate his children from himself. THE ADORATION OF HIS CHARACTER. "Hallowed be thy name." The great subject of all of the teaching of Jesus,—"THY KINGDOM COME." The kingdom that should grow like the mustard seed, slowly expand like the leaven, or increase by faithful service, as in the parable of the talents, or become firmly fixed in the life, like the house upon the rock, makes its appeal to all attentive souls, as in the parable of the Sower; and so through all the marvellously beautiful similitudes thus made.

"THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN." The antithesis here of earth and heaven does not mean the antithesis of place so much as material worked in. It is the state-

ment that the will of God is not dependent upon deliverance from the flesh, but is the will of God in the flesh; as Paul said, "The life that I now live in the flesh I live *by the faith of the Son of God*," — the will of God which Jesus so continually identifies with the kingdom of Heaven.

Now follows the single petition which has to do with our earthly living: "GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD." That is, give us to-day "the bread of the day"; and what Jesus evidently had in mind was the oriental habit to supply, free of cost, one who left the house or the tent in the morning with food for the day, until he could get to his next resting-place. The prayer is not remarkable for its anxiety about provision: it is remarkable for its reticence as to how much the provision shall be. It is to be simply enough to tide us over from morning until evening or from evening to morning. It is "the bread of the day."

Now follows one of the most characteristic passages, because it is of the very essence of the teaching of Jesus, that no forgiveness is possible to any human being who has not in himself the same power to forgive which he expects of God. "Forgive us our trespasses, or debts, if we also forgive them that are indebted to us." It is re-enforced by the statement in Matt. vi. 14, 15: "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you. If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses." It is not a statement of arbitrary unwillingness, but that nothing can be possible from God unless it is possible to the soul which receives the gift. All music is dumb to the deaf ear, and all beauty is dead to the blind eye. The passages "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," must be taken together. It is constantly asked, Is it possible for God to lead souls into temptation? Temptation here does not necessarily mean the snare of sin. It is rather the soul's meek declaration that it is not strong, and it would not be tested beyond its strength. It asks not for a life free from trial, but asks for such divine direction that the trial shall not become evil for it.

An easy answer to the objection made concerning this is that phrase of James in his epistle, chap. i. 13,— "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." The doxology which follows is probably not a part of the prayer; it is not found in the oldest manuscripts, and is therefore omitted in the Revised Version of 1881. We have seen that it was not given in Luke's version, but was added by a later hand, entirely in conformity with the general tenor of the prayer; and the church has wisely maintained it as an ascription of "dominion and power and praise" to the infinite fatherhood of God.

NOTE.—The revisers of the New Testament who insert the word "one" after evil, following the example of Origen and Chrysostom, making Jesus pray that the Father would deliver them from the evil one, might be possibly justified by the strictest interpretation of the text, which may or may not have a personal sense in the adjective used; but it is not much in accord with the habit of speech which we find in the recorded sayings of Jesus, and, as no individual is given in the prayer, it would seem unnecessary to do more than say "but deliver us from evil," which to the oriental mind was quite as personal as if the individualizing term were added.

LESSON XX.

REVIEW AND SUMMARY.

In the nine lessons which we now review, the kingdom of Heaven appears more in its activities, and conveys more the idea of destiny than in the lessons which preceded these.

It is not now simply "the pearl of great price" which shows what is really worth while in life, but it is the "Good Samaritan" who shows how to make life itself worth while. The security of the "house on the rock" in this second series passes into the security of the sheep with their shepherd. "The leaven" and "the mustard seed," which work silently, the one representing the kingdom within, the other the kingdom in the world, take on now the similitude of the "laborers in the vineyard," who are rewarded for their work in proportion to the fidelity shown,— as that which unconsciously worked in the leaven and in the mustard seed,— or sense of responsibility,— which appears in "the talents" and in the "ten virgins," as a parable of judgment.

In this last, as in the others, individual integrity and devotion to opportunity are the lessons. "The lighted candle" shows the way, whereas, in the other series, "the sower" simply pointed out what conditions were fit for receiving the truth; but the soul lighted to show the truth now controls the very conditions of darkness that surround it. "The great supper" gives the festival of the kingdom of Heaven, its generosity, and, as a reverse picture, the disinclination of those for whom it is prepared to avail themselves of its preparation.

In "the vine and the branches" we have all life running back to its source in God, and, in "the prodigal son," all life rising, even from sinful conditions, to its refuge in God; whilst "the prayer of Jesus" binds the whole series together in the natural outbreathing of devout and filial affection.

Topics for Study.

Show how, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus answers the scribe's question better by shifting its emphasis to another point. He asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus said, "Who is neighbor to him who fell among thieves?"

Is the point in the parable of the Good Samaritan that the Priests and Levites were unsympathetic, or is it that the sympathy of the Samaritan appears where it was not to be expected?

Was it the habit of Jesus to make sweeping generalizations, or was it his habit to pierce to the centre of the subject and reveal the springs of action? Which is the better way?

In the Shepherd and his Sheep, where dependence of the sheep is taught, and care by the shepherd, as also in the parable of the Lost Sheep, is there not a passage which has been commonly misread by the Christian Church, and what is the true reading? How do you reconcile the difference between the parable and the explanation? What is the difference between unity and uniformity, and can one be possible without the other, and, if so, which?

In the Laborers in the Vineyard, was any real injustice done those who received what they agreed to take, because those who had worked less time received the same? What controls wages in the world, and what ought to control wage-earners? What is the test of the value of religious work in the kingdom of Heaven?

In which parable is it taught that foolishness may be as fatal as sin in its effects? And is not disregard to plain conditions sin, when it seems only foolishness?

In the Laborers in the Vineyard and in the Ten Virgins and in the Great Supper how far does the idea of judgment give ground for the common interpretation which speaks of the Last Judgment? Do any of these parables necessarily carry us into the future life? Can there be any *last* judgment? Is there any point at which education ceases in the preparation of man for the kingdom of God? Would God be God if anywhere in his universe there was any soul whom he had given up?

Where does the emphasis fall in the story of the Lighted Candle? How can we raise the folly of showing our "good works" into a virtue? Is it not mock modesty to belittle a spiritual achievement which has cost the soul a struggle, and in which God has been a partner?

Give some modern instances which will correspond to the excuses made by the guests who did not want to go to the GREAT SUPPER. Is it meant, then, to be taught in the Great Supper that there is any antagonism between common affairs and the kingdom of Heaven? What do you think of the philanthropy of the parable of the Great Supper? Does the value of the story depend upon the supper which these poor people received, as an unusual treat, or on the love which was shown in an unusual manner?

How did we think of the nature of Christ with respect to God and his children when we studied the parable of the Vine and the Branches? Is any difference made there between the life of the branch and the life of the vine? Note how beautifully it is said that, as the vine bears the branch, the branch bears the fruit, and both are under the same nurture. "My Father is the husbandman." Could anything be done for the vine in which the branch would not necessarily share?

Review the bearing of the story of the Prodigal Son upon the fictitious theories of atonement which have constituted schemes of organization for the fact of unalterable love.

What did the disciples gain in the prayer of Jesus, which they had not before in the ritual of their church service, if the prayer was taken out of the ritual? Study the story of the Friend at Midnight, which follows the prayer of Jesus, in the gospel of Luke, and point out the mistake commonly made in the use of that parable. What did we call the argument? Was it comparison or contrast? How does this story bear upon what is known in the Christian churches as "the week of prayer"?

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